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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 001204

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: HAMAS CONTINUES TO INTERFERE WITH GAZA ASSISTANCE

REF: JERUSALEM 610

Classified By: Deputy Principal Officer Greg Marchese for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: According to international NGO and UN sources, Hamas continues to interfere in the distribution of assistance in Gaza. Hamas does not routinely block aid distributed by groups that rebuff its demands, but there have been a number of serious incidents of harassment in recent months. Hamas, for example, has asserted control over one Gaza NGO and is trying to access its bank accounts. The UN attempts to shield international NGOs from dealing directly with Hamas, not always successfully. In spite of the difficult operating environment, NGOs are exploring new programs, including cash-for-work, commodities-for-work, agricultural, and clean-up programs. End summary.

Most NGOs Able to Ignore Hamas Harassment

12. (C) NGOs that deliver humanitarian assistance in Gaza report Hamas' attempts to interfere in their operations generally have little practical effect. NGO contacts told ConGenOffs that their strategy of ignoring calls and letters from Hamas requesting information and "coordination" has been largely, though not wholly, successful. They report sporadic incidents of Hamas interference, e.g. Hamas representatives appearing at NGO offices and requesting information. Many such incidents occur in Rafah, they said, where local "Ministry of Social Affairs" representatives are particularly aggressive.

But Incidents of Serious Interference Persist

13. (C) One NGO, CHF, reported more serious incidents of interference, including daily visits from Hamas "Ministry of Social Affairs" and "Ministry of Labor" representatives to its offices with requests for information. Sources at CHF said that giving the officials information from CHF's website mollified them for a while, but, eventually, Hamas became more confrontational. CHF's Gaza office director was summoned to the local police station. CHF sources said the office director feared for his safety, but at the meeting Hamas representatives called the summons "a mistake" and sent him away. OXFAM (an NGO that does not deliver USG assistance) has reportedly complied with Hamas requests for beneficiary lists and other information.

14. (C) The UN attempts to shield international and local NGOs by dealing directly with Hamas on the NGO community's behalf. The UN has supplied NGOs with a "template" that provides guidance on what general, publicly available information to disclose to Hamas authorities when contacted. UN officials

are willing to submit these forms to Hamas' authorities on NGOs' behalf to try to fend off unwelcome office visits.

Hammas Takes Over Local NGO,
Pressures Banks for Control of Funds

15. (C) International NGO representatives said that, on June 17, Hamas asserted direct control over the Patients' Friends Benevolent Society (PFBS), a local NGO that has previously partnered with USAID to deliver health care assistance in Gaza. The Director of the Palestine Monetary Authority's (PMA) Financial Follow-Up Unit, Riyad Aweidah, told ConGen Treasury Attache that Hamas is attempting to gain control over PFBS' bank accounts in Gaza. Aweidah said that Hamas sent letters to Cairo Amman Bank and Housing Bank in Gaza demanding that they change PFBS' signature cards for its local accounts. The banks refused, continued Aweidah, and are now "under pressure" from Hamas. Aweidah said that PMA will ask the High Court to issue an order barring the change in signature cards. Aweidah said that Hamas may be purposefully antagonizing the PMA, adding that Hamas has been "looking for a fight" since the PMA published notices declaring Hamas' new Islamic National Bank an illegal entity.

NGOs Seek to Broaden Gaza Assistance Activities

16. (SBU) In spite of Hamas' harassment and the difficult operating environment in Gaza, international NGOs report exploring ways to increase and diversify their activities in Gaza. NGO representatives say they are trying to create

JERUSALEM 00001204 002 OF 002

employment in Gaza through cash-for-work, commodities-for-work, agricultural, and clean-up programs. CARE, for example, has launched a program that provides inputs and subsidies to 200 local farmers to provide fresh vegetables to 1,000 Gaza families. Several international NGOs report success in implementing cash-for-work schemes that pay Gaza residents to clear rubble.
WALLES